A WORLD SAFE FOR CHILDREN:

MEETING THE CHALLENGE IN THE 1990s

1990 DPI/NGO Annual Conference -- United Nations Headquarters, New York NY USA 12-14 September 1990

Points from the Podium:

No species can survive a breakdown in the care and protection of children. Its consequences are evidently lethal.

Why is there not more moral outrage at this obscene daily harvest of our youngest and most vulnerable?

A new ethos is beginning to emerge, which says that children should have a "first call" on the resources and the concerns of society.

AN NGO CONFERENCE SUMMARY AND SPECIAL REPORT TO WORLD LEADERS TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR CHILDREN

Representatives of governments, Non-Governmental Organizations, citizen interest groups and United Nations bodies met in New York City at United Nations Headquarters from September 12th to 14th to discuss the plight of the world's children, and what NGOs can do to better their condition.

A record audience of over 1,100 NGO representatives from 60 countries analyzed and examined the critical factors affecting the world's children during the Annual Conference of the United Nations Department of Public Information for Non-Governmental Organizations. This conference follows the adoption by the U.N. General Assembly in November 1989 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child,* and immediately precedes the **WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN** which will be held at U.N. Headquarters in New York on September 29-30, 1990.

The key points made by Conference participants are the following:

Children Develop in a Holistic, Synergistic Environment

Children throughout the world are affected by ethical and moral imperatives, physical considerations, and social, economic, political, and legal frameworks. These factors affect children individually and as a whole, each reacting with the other. They apply equally in both industrialized as well as developing countries, since they cut across all lines. Effective programs should be holistic and synergistic, looking after the total welfare of the child and considering its total environment, and stressing equality of treatment for all children.

Children Need and Deserve "First Call" on World Resources, Development Programs

At a time when military expenditures around the world are under intense

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Points from the Podium:

Children must no longer be the victims of the follies of their elders.

The rights of children mean the obligations to children.

If we fail to remove obstacles to our children's education, all the problems the world will face will be of our own making.

By not doing the possible, governments and others become the oppressors of children.

scrutiny, Conference speakers repeatedly urged governments to accord children "first call" on resources, meeting not only the moral imperatives of helping children but their physical considerations as well. The "first call" should be the highest priority when establishing social and economic development plans. Pragmatic and low-cost solutions are available.

Nations Must Ratify the Convention

All participants in the Conference felt strongly that world leaders can make a tangible demonstration of their commitment to improving the plight of children by ratifying and implementing the *Convention on the Rights of the Child,* adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in November 1989. The *Convention* was seen as the start of a continuing process. It must be translated into national laws and practices. Some regional models already exist (e.g. Europe).

Resources for Child Survival, Protection and Development:

< > **Health** -- Universal immunization, proper nutrition, adequate food supply and distribution, and availability of basic physical and mental health services at the community level are vital. Nations should strive for elimination of severe "traditional practices" that harm children (e.g. female circumcision) and reduction of infant and maternal mortality. Governments must increase budgets of ministries concerned with children and emphasize programs which prevent illnesses.

< > **Women** -- Governments should stress such important social programs as paid maternity programs and leave, breast-feeding and day-care. They should bolster the roles of both parents while recognizing the role of women in child health and development. They should initiate programs which promote the education, health and nutrition of women.

< > **Population** -- Governments must deal with the effects of overpopulation, as well as emphasize effective birth-control and child-spacing programs.

< > **Education** -- Governments and citizens must adopt a new vision for education--namely, global goals with nation-specific

Points from the Podium:

Less than one day's military expenditure per year is all that is needed to prevent the death of 50 million children over the coming decade.

It is the children of today who will inherit the effects of accumulating environmental problems.

We have the knowledge and the technology... what has been lacking, until now, is sustained coordinated will to put the solutions into action.

Children represent a "sacred cause" in the North as well as in the South, whatever may be the political, traditional, cultural, ethnic, social and religious differences.

programs. Programs should stress education for change, peace, positive human values, and languages. A high priority must be set for the education of women and girls, reduction of illiteracy, universal access to primary and basic education, and the establishment of do-able goals.

< > **Debt/Poverty** -- Governments should work to ease the crippling burden of international debt, which contributes to the massive poverty of children in the Third World. They should consider debt payment moratoria to redeploy resources to benefit children, promotion of anti-poverty programs, better distribution of anti-poverty resources, and an end to corruption and inefficiency.

< > **Development** -- A new global compact in favor of change is needed. From all analyses presented, it seemed evident that the additional costs of financing programs for children are relatively small. There must be a restructuring of present social expenditures in favor of those favoring children. A drastic correction of the imbalance between exorbitant military expenditures (including those in the Third World) and those for doctors and teachers must be made with utmost urgency. Implementation must be taken down to urban and rural levels. Programs should stress community empowerment and services, proper choices and allocation. The highest priority should go to the needs of children in development programs.

< > **Environmental Pollution** -- Young children require clean water and clean air. Programs must stress mandatory pollution controls, improved energy efficiency, and development of safe alternate energy sources.

< > **Children in Difficult Circumstances** -- War-victimized children, refugee and kidnapped children, exploited working children, migrant and street children, and victims of domestic violence, as well as children in slavery and prostitution, all need protection. Effects of mental and physical handicaps must be considered. Children are prime targets of crime and substance abuse--a result of the greed and neglect of adults. Improved anti-crime and anti-drug programs, stressing multidisciplinary approaches, must be enacted.

< > **Research Needs** -- Budget allocations must be increased for pertinent national and international research dealing with the

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condition of children.

Points from the Podium:

Public opinion maintains a pressure on the politicians to abide by their Summit commitments.

NGOs are in a position to play a role of paramount importance to get across the "child issue" message with a view to upholding and nourishing the interest of the media.

Tell me how you treat your children and I will tell you who you are.

Public Education and the News Media Needed

NGOs are "non-news" media, and can work effectively with the news media in telling the problems facing the world's children. NGOs and media can communicate these concerns effectively to the peoples and governments of the world. There was emphasis on the need to create appropriate consciousness in the media to give more time to children's issues, to keep pressure on politicians, and create ongoing political will to solve those issues. Lastly, the importance of developing an entire communications strategy internationally and nationally down to the grassroots level was stressed.

All Sectors of Society Must Collaborate

As programs are devised and implemented, children should be involved as much as possible in this effort. Both the public and private sectors must be equally involved, with not-for-profit organizations, corporations, and non-governmental organizations all being mobilized and involved from the planning process to local implementation. Religious leaders must plan a major part. All sectors must be involved.

NGOs: Allies and Constituents of Governments

While governments have a primary role in devising, developing and implementing programs to improve the plight of children, NGOs can work effectively with them by communicating ideas, plans, programs and accomplishments to their members and to the world at large. NGOs are highly effective advocates, communicators, "cheerleaders and program implementors," and their efforts can motivate the peoples of the world to "buy into" programs that will aid the development and living conditions of their children. NGOs have played a major role in making the **WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN** happen. They will be essential partners in implementing the new political will to make the world safe for children.

Prepared by:
NGO/DPI Executive Committee
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